

WHAT IS NEW THOUGHT?

By Dr. Janna Lewis

Have you ever wondered what the name “New Thought” really means? You probably have at least some vague idea, although it seems to mean many different things to many people, not all of them useful or even pertinent (the things, not the people).

New Thought has often been mistaken for **New Age** – an erroneous but understandable mistake as both have enlightenment as their goals. This mistake, however, taints N.T. (New Thought) with the same ‘woo-woo’ brush that often smeared New Age – at least in its earlier years. New Thought is NOT New Age even though they both draw on some of the same ancient concepts, accepting as part of their heritage certain Eastern traditions as well as such themes as holism and concern for nature. At this point, however, they wave goodbye; their means to their goal of enlightenment taking two very divergent paths.

New Age’s path leads in the direction of psychic phenomena (usually considered to be in the realm of non-spiritual, supernatural forces) and the mysterious abstruseness of other occult practices where information is available only to the highly initiated.

New Thought, on the other hand, has both feet firmly directed toward a belief that each individual can reach enlightenment through direct and personal access to a loving, inspiring God working in and through all that is. And although N.T. draws, at least in part, from the traditional past, using the beliefs and teaching of some of the more highly acclaimed spiritual leaders such as Jesus and Buddha, N.T. is NOT a fixed system of beliefs.

New Thought blends religion with the newest information from all fields, including (and maybe even particularly) science and philosophy. Not all people in N.T. desire or accept all the changes as they occur, and that works, too, for N.T. is an advocate of free choice. This, of course, includes individual selection of spiritual tenets: if it works for you, keep it; if it doesn’t, throw it out.

Another thing that N.T. is NOT is a quick-fix. Many New Thinkers have come from one of the older, planted-in-cement religions where they had no choice but to follow God’s laws (very literally and stridently interpreted, I might add) or be *damned*. Newcomers to New Thought are intoxicated with the freshness in the idea that they may have some say in developing their own lives - which of course, they do, but often not in quite the way they anticipated. They have heard such phrases associated with N.T. as ‘mind over matter’, ‘what you think is what you get’ and ‘picture it and it will happen’. They arrive, expectation sizzling in their veins, and are often disappointed. They have yet to learn what most ‘old’ New Thinkers already know – that you have to *walk the walk as well as talk the talk*.

Now that we know what it’s not, *what is N.T.?* From the various references to an ancient age, one might begin to believe that New Thought is not ‘new’ at all. The fact of the matter is, the *New* in New Thought has little to do with any dated system of thought, old or new, but, instead refers to its upwardly expanding, progressively changing, freshly developing, perpetually advancing, open-endedness.

New Thought is meant to imply a mind alive in escalating spirals of awareness, continually searching, growing, and changing. And these changes do include some ideas that felt ‘new’ and found popularity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries among certain

open-minded thinkers such as Mrs. Malinda Cramer and Annie Rix Militz (Divine Science), Charles and Myrtle Fillmore (Unity), Ernest Holmes (Religious Science/Science of Mind), and others. N.T.'s breaking away from traditional religions was never more evident than in its acceptance of an immanent, indwelling Spirit over the transcendent ('out there') God of old. Another of its beliefs that makes it 'new' is that mind (Mind) is Cause and that matter is the result, the 'effect' of mind. Also, by aligning our minds with the ever-present God-Mind, we have a means of healing bodily disease and curing the seeming defects of life – another bold divergence from traditional belief systems.

New Thought, above all else, stands for *Practicing the Presence of God*. We do this scientifically and methodically by understanding God's function as well as our own, and utilizing it in our daily lives. In the gratifying words of Horatio W. Dresser, *Spirit of New Thought*,

“. . . practicing the presence of God (is) . . . living a selfless life through union with a power that is Love in action; . . . a power which can bring sweetness and light and peace to people; rob death of its sting, and pain of its poignancy. (It) takes the terror out of disease . . . and crowns life with the joy and health and abundance which are the rightful inheritance of every child of God.”

This upwardly expanding progress of mind in N.T. is believed to be always with the ultimate goal of perfect unity with God - with God being Life on an ever-richer, ever-grander scale. N.T. believes that unity with God is revealed through mystical insights, intuition, and life's experiences as God inspires and lures man ever onward and upward. Ultimately it is a New Thinkers' grandest desire to know at his very deepest level the words of Jesus: "The Father and I are one."